UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.17/IPF/1997/7
28 January 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel
on Forests
Fourth session
11-21 February 1997
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREST-RELATED DECISIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS, INCLUDING AN EXAMINATION OF SECTORAL AND CROSS-SECTORAL LINKAGES

Letter dated 27 January 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden and Uganda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations and the Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations have the honour to transmit to you the final report (English only) of the Inter-Governmental Workshop of Experts on Sustainable Forestry and Land Use: The Process of Consensus-Building (see annex).

The workshop, which took place in Stockholm from 14 to 18 October 1996, was sponsored by the Governments of Sweden and Uganda. It was conducted in support of item I.1. of the programme of work of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Its main objective was to contribute to a better understanding of the participation and consensus-building principles, and of their implications on the formulation and implementation of national land use and forestry programmes. The report of the workshop should make an important contribution to the discussions at the fourth session of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, to be held in New York from 11 to 21 February 1997.

* E/CN.17/IPF/1997/1.

In preparation of the upcoming session, we should be grateful if you would have the attached report circulated as an official document of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

(Signed) Peter OSVALD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Sweden to the United Nations

(Signed) Mathias MULUMBA SEMAKULA KIWANUKA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Uganda to the United Nations

ANNEX

REPORT OF THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL WORKSHOP OF EXPERTS ON SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY AND LAND USE:

The Process of Consensus Building

Stockholm 14-18 October 1996

A. BACKGROUND

1. Actions to promote participation and consensus among all interested parties interested in forestry development are increasingly viewed as indispensable. The need for this workshop arose from the desire to appreciate and better understand the challenges encountered as nations and communities seek to formulate plans and practices in forestry and land use based on participation and consensus. Participants were conscious of the discussions during the formal IPF sessions which drew attention to the need for more participatory, integrated, and cross-sectoral approaches to forestry planning and implementation, taking into account the needs and requirements of all interested parties, as well as policies and actions being promoted by other sectors, particularly those related to often conflicting land uses.

2. The discussions took into account the German initiative on Promotion of National Forest and Land Use Programmes which considered the segments relevant to programme element 1.1, including sectoral planning; policy and institutional setting; investment programming; national capacities to plan; and international cooperation. It recommended that all interested parties should be involved in a participatory and partnership process. It should be noted that while the German initiative concentrated on institutional and planning mechanisms, this workshop sought to complement this effort by concentrating on processes and methodologies conducive to concensus building with a view to enhancing conventional forestry and land use planning.

3. The workshop of experts took place in Stockholm, Sweden on 14-18 October 1996. It was conducted in support of the IPF agenda item 1.1 (Progress through national and land use plans). The main objective was to contribute to a better understanding of the participation and consensus building principles and implications thereof, in formulating and implementing national forestry programmes.

4. The workshop was attended by 48 experts from 21 countries and 6 Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations who participated in their individual capacity. It was sponsored by the governments of Sweden and Uganda and hosted by the government of Sweden. Eight countries prepared case studies which were summarised in a synthesis report. This report, together with the case studies and proceedings, will become part of the documentation from the workshop.

B. FINDINGS

5. The processes of consensus building imply that the real issues and inherent conflicts are understood by all stakeholders. During the review of the consensus building process, the following was noted:

a. There is no common definition of consensus although a number of countries and organisations have attempted to define the concept. A working definition is necessary in order to gauge the degree of successful consensus.

b. Consensus building is a mechanism that can be conducive to successful forestry and land use programmes. The workshop recognized encouraging achievements in consensus building in forest and land use programmes at international, national and local levels.

c. Consensus needs to be judged according to results rather than written or verbal agreements and commitments.

d. Consensus building must be a creative learning process. It involves acquiring new knowledge and experiences that are constantly incorporated in an iterative process. It acknowledges mistakes and transforms them into new learning experiences.

e. In order to participate meaningfully in the process of consensus building, all those involved at all levels of society should be empowered through training, by providing relevant information, by creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence, and by creating awareness of responsibilities and obligations. This will help society learn and appreciate the benefits of acting in consensus.

f. A thorough analysis of circumstances should be carried out during the process of consensus building, including issues at stake, existing institutions and fora, and parties involved. Small powerful groups may try to counter positions of the majority.

g. Society at large may have priorities that are different from those of foresters and forest administrations. Professionals, foresters and others, need to understand the diverse needs and priorities of society and reflect them in their work in order to achieve a mutual understanding.

h. Solutions to many forestry problems lie outside the forestry sector. Therefore consensus building would need to include areas such as agricultural policy making and efficient use of fossil fuels.

i. The consensus building process should help to adopt

societal values that will integrate and harmonise vested individual interests with collective interests.

j. In practice, it is not always possible to involve all interested parties at all times and under all conditions. However, every effort should be taken to include these interests.

k. Through the confidence and motivation that are created, secure property rights, ownership, and tenure of land contribute to improved negotiating positions in consensus building and conflict resolution.

l. There should be a strong link between consensus building and decision making, particularly in connection with policy formulation and planning. Decisions taken in consensus are likely to achieve more sustainable results than those taken in isolation.

m. Methods for consensus building are many and varied. Further, there is a diversity of circumstances in which individual countries can apply these principles. The success of consensus therefore very much depends on how each country responds to these circumstances. This implies that National Forestry Programmes designed during a consensus building process cannot have a uniform format.

n. Trends in land use change rapidly with other developments and conflicts over land use are increasingly common. Therefore, conflict resolution mechanisms are at the centre of consensus building processes for sustainable land use. It is important that the conflicts involved are understood by all parties concerned.

o. It should be taken into account that during the process of consensus building, obstacles will always be met, and risks must be taken.

p. The history and particularities of a given country have a bearing on its current situation and should be considered when undertaking consensus building.

q. It was noted that consensus building requires:

- identification of all issues, goals and objectives, areas where consensus cannot currently be achieved, interested parties, leadership and areas where information is needed;
- establishing an action agenda;
- willingness and commitment of all parties;
- understanding the interests and needs of all parties;
- providing support where needed;
- establishing trust and confidence;
- proceeding at a pace acceptable to all; and

- the process should be voluntary, transparent, open and consultative;

C. OPTIONS FOR ACTION

6. CSD is requested to acknowledge consensus building as an important process to address sustainable forest management to be included in future deliberations at national and international levels. There is a need for continuation of international dialogue on consensus building through appropriate institutional arrangements at all levels in order to arrive at a common understanding of the concept and its relation to participation, conflict resolution and the existing instruments of national forest and land use programmes.

7. Develop mechanisms to strengthen and support research and information exchange on methodologies for consensus building at all levels, including education of all interested parties in forestry and land use programmes.

8. Support should be given to enhancing horizontal and vertical linkages in order to strengthen collaboration between sectors and different levels of planning.

9. Countries should be encouraged to embark on a long-term process of consensus building in forestry and land use programmes, continuously identifying the necessary steps to be taken with respect to issues, institutional arrangements and stakeholders. Countries are also encouraged to share their experiences through existing reporting arrangements.